



tia kelly

Give Me
You



a Love Sessions story

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For more titles by Tia Kelly or to contact the author, please visit www.tiawithapen.com.

Every story has a past and I wanted to share one of the prequels to The Love Sessions with you. This is the story of Mya and Donovan.

In Give Me You, when Mya Norwood and Donovan Sinclair decided to bring the new year in with a bang, neither of them expected their friendship to fizzle away the morning after. Now Mya is ready to move on, but there is one obstacle standing in her way... Donovan. A man that is determined to prove to her that friends can be lovers, too.

Enjoy!

- tia.

GIVE ME YOU

by
Tia Kelly

Chapter One

The moment the deejay announced the New Year had arrived, the revelers went wild. A celebration was also happening on the other side of the floor-to-ceiling windows, showing the world how Times Square in New York partied. While Times Square brought in another year, inside the hotel ballroom another unprecedented celebration was taking place.

Donovan Sinclair raised the champagne bottle in the air with his right hand, pulling Mya closer with his left one. She smiled up at him just before he leaned down to give her a short, sweet kiss on her lips.

"Happy New Year, baby," he murmured in her ear. With a smile, she returned the sentiment just as Donovan hugged his friend tightly and continued to sway his body to the upbeat tune along with her.

At this point in the party, men's ties dangled from dress shirt collars and ladies wearing the most fashion-forward gowns danced right out of their shoes. Donovan had long ago removed his tuxedo jacket and unbuttoned the top of his shirt. Hanging loosely around his neck was a gray bow tie matching Mya's flowing gunmetal-gray gown with a fitted asymmetrical bodice.

When the duo had first stepped out for the evening, Donovan's tall frame and distinct air of confidence caught the eyes of many onlookers from the elevator through the hotel lobbies they walked through. Women swooned and men envied the man that favored Major League baseball player Matt Kemp. Short, silken, dark curls begged for a woman's fingers to slip through them during the throes of passion. Broad shoulders filled out his dark tailored designer tuxedo. Lengthy legs that once ran on the gridiron took long, purposeful strides everywhere he and his friend walked. Mya Norwood didn't need to be on his arm to garner her fair share of attention. Daring heels heightened her petite body and her skin glowed naturally under the city lights. The couple could have easily been mistaken for a high-profile celebrity couple with their good looks and charm.

Now an hour past midnight, the pair had had enough of the crowded scene and escaped the VIP area they were hanging out in. Leaving empty shot glasses, champagne bottles, and good times behind, Donovan and Mya let their laughter and voices fill the halls they walked through until they reached their hired limousine.

Seated inside of the limousine, Mya reached for the stereo's remote while Donovan grabbed two bottles of water for them, knowing they'd had way too much to drink that evening. He gazed out the window at the crowded streets and lights bouncing off the windows as the driver drove them to their rooms at

another luxury hotel. Although their hotel was less than fifteen minutes away, the night traffic would make the ride much longer. Donovan purposely wanted to stay away from the ongoing party around Times Square, opting for a relaxing place to unwind after attending the celebration.

He leaned back against the headrest and fought a desire he felt for a decade. The moment he'd seen Mya answer the door wearing a formfitting dress with her loosely curled hair pinned up, he wanted her. Although that was nothing new, because he'd wanted her since he first met her. Unfortunately, he couldn't have her. Doing so would disrupt the bond they had. Normally, they would have their other friends around to help him keep his hidden desire in check, but tonight they were solo in New York, as everyone else had their own plans this year.

Instead of confessing his need for his friend, tonight they would sleep off the fun times in their own separate rooms, like they always did, and meet up for brunch at Sarabeth's in the morning. Donovan knew Mya had a love affair with the restaurant's lemon and ricotta pancakes, but the moment he felt her small hand reach inside the waistband of his pants, their plans for Sunday brunch had been easily forgotten.



Leaning against the headboard in her hotel room, Donovan watched Mya closely through hooded eyes. The look in them let Mya know he was appreciating the naughty side he never knew existed. Mya swiftly lifted the hem of her gown up above her hips, but faltered once the bunched-up dress accumulated around her shoulders. The mild setback didn't deter her. She managed to writhe out of the silky fabric before tossing the garment to the floor. Soon her favorite bra joined the dress in the growing pile.

In all the years he'd known her, Donovan had never seen her nude. The closest he'd come was seeing her in a nightgown or in a conservative swimsuit during a trip to the beach. His eyes narrowed while watching the seductive performance while his erection grew even harder upon seeing her beautiful breasts, ripe and waiting for him to taste each one. Then, without warning, he felt his gut clench. Here he was in the middle of one of his favorite dreams and now was not the time to indulge in the feast before him.

Just as he moved to turn away, he heard her call his name.

"Donovan," she summoned. His mistake was returning his attention to her.

On her knees at the foot of the bed, Mya moved to slide her lace thong down her thighs. The moment the sheer black fabric moved past her hips,

Donovan could see a small heart-shaped patch of short, curly hair above her feminine opening and, on autopilot, he moved closer to slip his fingers between her slick caramel lips.

He added a second finger once the tightness eased up. His thumb circled her clit as she moved her body with the motion. Moving faster and faster, he felt her body squeeze around him, and his fingers started to get wetter from her excitement.

The thought of feeling himself deep within her honey-covered walls sobered him quickly. He intended to take his time with her, to remove that ridiculous myth in her head she'd confessed to him once before—that men were selfish lovers and didn't know how to please a woman.

Donovan slowed his finger assault on her waiting body and Mya purred in his ear as he explored her tender flesh. She then reached forward with both hands, tracing the outline of his thick, engorged penis through the thin layer of fabric between them. Reaching inside his tuxedo pants, she released his hardened cock from the constricting attire. Although she hadn't hidden her surprise the first time she felt his size when they were inside the car, she couldn't wait to see what he was working with up close and personally. Now with his engorged rod prominently sitting before her, Mya's body trembled.

"Help me take these off," she asked with authority, gesturing toward his dark boxer briefs and pants. Before she could assist him, Donovan removed everything from his body and tossed the articles of clothing to the floor.

Now leaning back against the massive padded leather headboard behind him, Donovan waited for her next command. He loved having control in life, but he appreciated Mya's performance more. Feeling her soft hands move across the contours of his now nude body, he naturally hardened beneath her.

Mya had always admired Donovan's body. He ran several miles every morning and worked out just as often, which was evident in his strong biceps and firm thighs. Mya also wondered what it would feel like to grab hold of his taut backside while making love. Leaning forward, she flicked her tongue along each curve leading to his prominent erection standing before her, letting the pulsing veins be her guide.

She'd heard Donovan could love a woman into an orgasmic frenzy, but had never dared to find out how. That would have pushed them across the line, blurring their friendship. Damn the protocol of friendship, she thought while he stared down at her and ran his fingers through her hair while loosening it from the twist it was in. Mya wanted him to sex her like crazy, and she couldn't wait a minute more for him to begin. First, she needed to explore this gorgeous man before she relinquished control for the evening.

In one swift bow, Mya took the head into her mouth, sucking and teasing the tip of his penis before moving further down his shaft. With both hands wrapped around his massive girth, Mya stroked him while working his dick in her mouth.

The sensual pleasure relaxed Donovan, and he let his head fall back against the headboard as his shoulders dropped. Suddenly his body jolted upright the moment he felt her taking him deep into her throat. Reaching for her shoulders, Donovan pulled her back to prevent the little seductress from causing his dick to explode before he could sample her. Mya was not the kind of woman he wanted to treat like a porn star during their first encounter.

Mya looked down at him, catching his eyes darken the minute they locked with hers. The desire was evident and proven the moment he took her taut nipple in his mouth while slipping his index finger deep inside her. She was even wetter than before.

“Oh!” she gasped before coming.

She fell into his arms after her first orgasm coursed through her, and Donovan cradled her against him until he managed to ease her to the bed.

With his free hand, he ripped the panties off from around her thighs, and her legs immediately opened wider. He silently chastised himself for acting like a caveman, but he had wanted to be in this moment for ten years.

Channeling his prior thoughts about making love to Mya the right way, Donovan slowed down the pace of their foreplay and focused the rest of his energy on pleasing her. Tonight, Mya would be his queen.

He slipped two fingers back inside and moved them in and out of her. Donovan’s dick ached so badly he fought exploding on the sheets before he could even penetrate her. Feeling her walls gripping his fingers, Donovan looked at her face to see Mya’s eyes roll back. He moved down and replaced his fingers with his tongue while rubbing his thumb over the throbbing pearl between her sweet, delicate lips.

Mya’s back arched and he felt her orgasm hit the moment she clenched her nails into his shoulders, gripping him closer to her core and pulling him deeper into their hidden fantasy.

When the wave subsided, Donovan rose up on his arms, trying to control his desire to replace his tongue with his shaft. No matter how good this moment felt, Donovan did not want it to be like this. He fought guilt and needed a minute to get himself together before falling even deeper. It wasn’t supposed to be this way, he chided himself. Not like this.

Mya slowly raised a leg, placing her right foot above his shoulder. He felt the silky, soft heel slide slowly down his shoulder blade. Donovan looked back down at the woman in the bed before him taking her heavenly scent into his nostrils,

quickly forgetting his regret. She had spread her legs for him, beckoning Donovan to make love.

His groan was lost in the midst of her words.

"Donovan, please," she said. "I need to feel you inside me."

Seeing her open and wet as she traced the edges of her clitoris with her finger made Donovan's voice catch in his throat, forcing his words to sound broken. "Condom," was all he could muster. He hadn't planned to step out for sex while hanging out with his best friend tonight, so he was in her room unprepared. "I don't have any."

"I'm on birth control."

Donovan believed her and trusted her. He'd never had raw sex and didn't plan to until he married his wife, because there were too many diseases, he wasn't ready to be a father, and a lot of women lied about contraception. Mya would never lie to him, because she was not that type of woman. Damn, she was not making it easy to back out of this, but he had already tasted her and needed to feel her, too.

Donovan took a minute to remember his sanity before it was too late, but it already was. Mya lifted her head slightly from the pillow to move closer to him, just enough to meet his lips.

Their kiss unraveled him, as she coaxed him into exploring her mouth fully. His tongue moved against hers; she nibbled his lips and he teased hers. Then with one smooth, forceful thrust, Donovan took them to the point of no return.

She was tight, slick, warm, and wet, as he pumped his body into hers, lifting her back from the mattress. He loved being inside of her as he alternated between slow and deliberate, pulling himself out completely before thrusting back inside deeply, to hard and fast, just like she'd begged for it to be done.

With her legs wrapped around his waist, Donovan continued to drive himself home until the early morning hours greeted them.



Mya woke up and looked around, slowly remembering where she was. The clock on the hotel nightstand told her that it was almost two in the afternoon, and she fought to recall the hours before.

The last time she was in the room was before the New Year's Eve party. She was waiting to meet up with Donovan, because he'd booked their rooms for the evening and was taking the train in from Boston to celebrate New Year's with her. They'd decided it would be easier and more festive to take advantage of hotel rooms he had access to after their night of partying.

He had knocked on her door, looking sexy as hell in a tux when she greeted him. Then they took a limo to a party in Times Square, where they drank the night away.

Feeling a warm body beside her, it did not take long for Mya to discover she was in bed with Donovan and they were both naked. Possibly sensing her apprehension, Donovan moved closer to her in his sleep and wrapped one of his smooth, muscular arms around her waist with his semi-hard erection brushing against her thigh.

Fighting a brewing headache and regret, Mya eased out from under his grasp and rushed into the bathroom.

Chapter Two

"Mya, this is Donovan," he said clearly into his phone, despite feeling trepidation in his gut. "I'm not going to go into an 'about last night' speech, but I do need to know you're okay. We need to talk. Please call me."

After waking up that afternoon, Donovan had little time to bask in the afterglow of the best sex he'd ever had. Mya was not in bed, nor in the bathroom. He had tossed on clothes and walked to his door to see if she was in there. When he found it being cleaned by housekeeping, it didn't take him long to realize she'd skipped out on him. Further investigation with the concierge revealed that she'd taken a cab to Penn Station hours before.

He returned to his room, took a hot shower, and then tossed all of his belongings into his luggage. He only stopped long enough to call her twice and send a few text messages, but she wouldn't respond to any of his attempts to reach her. After rescheduling his car service, Donovan was soon en route for his home outside of Philadelphia.

Donovan waited two hours after walking in his front door for her to call, but she never did. He tried texting again, but when she didn't reply, he grabbed his car keys and drove to her apartment.

After ringing her doorbell twice, Donovan grew worried. He unlocked her front door with the key she'd given him for emergencies, walked in, and stopped short when he found her sitting in the middle of her sofa.

The spacious renovated industrial loft threatened to swallow up her small frame. Steel beams and exposed brick walls could have made her condo cold and sterile, but the warm tones and textured furnishings softened up the space.

Donovan walked toward her through the open layout, across the gleaming hardwood floors to get to her. He stopped in front of her, hunched low, and took one of her hands into his when the sight of Mya with tears in her eyes worried him.

"What's wrong?" he immediately asked, rushing to be by her side on the large sofa.

"Don't touch me!" she warned. Mya shook her head and pulled away when he tried to hug her. Feeling exposed, she crossed her arms across her silk nightgown. "Just go."

He looked at her, lifting the baseball cap from his head. "Why are you pushing me away?"

"We never should have slept together last night, Donovan. This messes up everything," she confessed. Mya prayed she could remember more about the

night before, but her memory failed her. All she could recall was the feeling of him thrusting in and out of her, filling her to capacity, but no memory of why she'd fallen in bed with him. The sudden recollection prompted her to suddenly feel her vagina clench. Never could she admit to her feelings for him, but did she tell him how she really felt last night after having too much to drink? It would ruin everything their friendship was based on if she had and was not worth becoming another notch on his belt. "I can't be one of your little flings, Donovan."

He shook his head, ready to argue. "That's not how I view you."

"Please go, Donovan." She cut him off quickly. His words could never make up for the way she felt or the confusion she needed to sort through on her own.

"I can't leave you like this."

"I just need some time and space."

He considered her plea, but didn't like the tone used when it was delivered. Now he was the one with a messed-up head and feeling rejected. He'd savored each and every minute he was with her and had her flesh wrapped around his. Now the woman sat there rejecting him, carrying on as if sleeping with him was the most repulsive act she'd ever participated in.

Recoiling, Donovan conceded. He couldn't lose her as a lover, but it would cut deep to lose her as a friend. "It was one night. We can blame it on the alcohol and go back to the way we were, right? I just need my number one girl back to keep me in line. You're not going to throw away our friendship because we got drunk and fucked each other, are you?"

Before he could take the words back, he saw the pain flicker in her eyes. Damn it, he didn't want to see her hurting, and he never would have used those words with someone as precious as his Mya, but she was wounding his pride and he was hurting, too. Donovan wanted to reclaim her hand in his, after she long ago released it, but he was already caught out there between exposing his emotions to a woman that didn't want anything to do with his heart and acting like a complete ass.

Mya had never felt his words sting her before, but she refused to admit how much his dismissal of their night together made her feel. "Give me some time."

Donovan nodded and kissed her cheek. She briefly pulled away, but when he pulled her into his arms for a long hug, their spat was momentarily forgotten. For one more moment, she had her friend again after their whirlwind sexual experience.

"I'm sorry for what I said, Mya." He stood up and walked to the front door before looking back at her. "Lunch on Friday?"

She stopped fidgeting with the throw blanket draped across her lap and looked up with a smile. They had been meeting for lunch every Friday for the past three years. Looking into his eyes, she lied: "Of course."

Mya noticed Donovan visibly relax his shoulders, and the glint in his eye returned. "Cool. Lock up."

Getting up from her seat on the couch, where she had been since she returned home, Mya not only locked her front door, but also added another item to her to-do list for the next day.

She had to call a locksmith if she planned to get on with her life.



The life of a crisis management attorney was never boring, but it was even more eventful when transitioning into the role of sports agent. Donovan looked around his office walls, seeing the framed jerseys for each of his clients. He was running out of space on his roster and his walls, but Donovan did not want Matthew Sutterland to slip from his grasp, and hoped to add a rookie Major League Baseball jersey to the shrine.

Hearing the Phillies head coach remark about Matthew's high school highlight films, Donovan turned his gaze back to the videoconference.

"You need a shortstop, and Matthew is your guy. If the Phillies aren't interested, then let me know and I will resume my previous conversation with the Rangers." Donovan settled back in his chair, knowing the Phillies would not like his last remark.

"Meet us halfway, Donnie," the general manager urged.

Although he was in the same city as most of the people he'd spent the past half-hour meeting with, Donovan had welcomed the opportunity to do a videoconference instead of a face-to-face meeting. He did not have the drive to bullshit his way through another meeting when his gut was still twisted.

Donovan grabbed a small rubber basketball off his desk and tossed it into the hoop hanging across the room. "You have to come better than that."

"We'll talk about it on our end and get back to you."

Donovan nodded and said goodbye before clicking the mouse to end their call. He then opened up his calendar to see what else he needed to tend to the rest of the day. Seeing his assistant was able to clear his schedule like he'd requested, Donovan grabbed his jacket and pressed the button to forward all calls to his cell phone. It had been four days since he'd last spoken to Mya.

Since she was not answering any of his phone calls, Donovan had no choice but to move on to plan B.

Donovan rode up the large industrial elevator to the third floor. He got off and walked the short distance to Mya's front door. He knew she would not be home for another hour, but he needed to get inside and start working on her surprise.

Moving the grocery bag to one hand, he pulled his key ring from his jeans pocket and stuck a key into the lock. After trying multiple times to unlock the door, it didn't take him long to realize she had changed the locks.

"Are you kidding me?" he muttered to himself. "What in the world is going through your head right now?"

Taking the key off the ring, he jotted a quick note on a ripped-off piece of the paper bag. Then he folded the key inside the paper before sliding it under her door.



Mya spotted him sitting at their usual table the moment she walked into the restaurant. Sensing her presence, Donovan glanced up at that exact same moment she walked past the hostess station.

Donovan noticed her usual buoyant steps were gone, and now Mya walked with heavy feet. He hesitantly pushed up from the table to greet her, uncertain what to expect her to say to him.

He was wearing a black button-down shirt with rolled-up sleeves and black pants; she hated to admit that Donovan looked sinfully delicious. He was not making it easy for her to tell him what she had to say. Their ten-year friendship was going to have to go on a longer hiatus than he probably expected, but it was what she needed to do to detox him from her system.

"Sorry I'm late," she said softly. "I had a noon deadline on the Mayer report, but the final data didn't arrive until this morning."

Donovan reached out to embrace her, but noticed she quickly moved out of his way and sat down across from him. Biting back his next choice of words, he carefully decided which direction to take their conversation.

Before he could speak, Mya opened her menu and started rattling off her options.

Donovan recognized her stalling tactics and allowed her the time she needed to warm up to him. "You always get the same thing every time we come here. I already placed our order."

"Perhaps it's time to try something new."

He teased her with a wink. "Like we did last weekend?"

Mya's face turned crimson and she tossed the menu on the table. "I thought we were going to put that behind us and pretend it never happened." She had already pleased herself four times since while trying to remember every place his fingers had touched her. The depth he'd stroked her and the tingling sensation his lips left when they loved her was tattooed on her body and in her mind forever.

Now the mere thought of him exploding deep inside her made her have an orgasm aftershock, and she blushed harder.

"Mya, may I ask you a question?"

She slowly raised her head and focused her eyes on him, dreading what he was about to ask her. No doubt it had to do with the night he'd made love to her until the sun came up. "That's why you demanded I show up today, isn't it?"

He'd known she would not stand him up after telling her that if she did, he would show up at her office.

"If we are such great friends and have amazing chemistry in and out of the bed, why can't we give a relationship a try?"

She'd asked herself that same question numerous times, even before they found themselves in bed together. Unfortunately, she knew no matter what reasoning she could come up with, the truth was that Donovan was a confirmed bachelor. Her life did not need drama, and a man determined to stay eternally single would wreak havoc on her heart.

"Having sex once does not mean we have great chemistry in the sack."

"We had sex three times that night."

"Do you want a trophy?"

"Only if that trophy is you."

"Look, Donnie. We had too much to drink and we crossed the line. I'm trying to forget what my best friend looked like naked, and I hope you will, too."

"Sorry, sweetheart. How you look, feel, and taste are branded in my memory forever."

The server placed their dishes in front of them. Donovan and Mya proceeded to eat in silence before he spoke up.

"I have an idea and I think it will solve our dilemma. Either way, it will get us through this and let us know where we stand as friends and something more."

"I already told you where we stand. We can be friends as long as you give me some space to feel comfortable again, but we can't be anything more. If you keep pressuring me, then we can't be friends either."

"Just hear me out," he confidently replied. Of all his experience handling crises for governments, corporations, and professional sports entities, Donovan

was having a difficult time pleading his case to a woman. He tapped into his skilled negotiating tactics and explained his proposition.

After hearing him out, Mya leaned back in her chair and considered everything he'd said.

"So you want to try dating for six weeks? I already said I would not be your lover."

"No, sweetheart. I want to go out on dates and court you for the next six weeks. There will be no sex, even if you beg me for it. We would spend our time strictly getting to know each other, like potential lovers do."

"But I already know everything there is to know about you," she argued. "I know more than I want to know, to be honest."

"You know me as a friend, but you have yet to know how I am in a relationship."

"Oh, I've heard plenty about you already. I think there are websites devoted to your experiences, authored by a few jilted exes," she joked, but at the same time cringed, knowing she was now a part of the infamous list of women he'd bedded. Donovan Sinclair had gotten into her panties and all she had left were the memories of his impressive lovemaking skills. But whose fault was that, she asked herself.

"I know you're lying, because every relationship I've been in ended amicably. We can even call a few of my exes if you want references."

Mya groaned and waved her hands in front of her, protesting. "Please don't."

Donovan chuckled. "I'm just messing with you, sweetheart. So between now and Valentine's Day, we go out on a few dates, spend time together, and really get to know each other the same way you would check out your next boyfriend?"

"I would never take six weeks to decide if someone is worth my time or not. I can usually tell within the first ten minutes of meeting them."

"Well, this experience will be different. We also have to take into account my travel schedule and the wedding."

Mya agreed. The destination wedding for their closest friends Darius and Veronica was going to monopolize a lot of their free time in the next few weeks. With their hands full helping their friends get married, there would be less time for Donovan and Mya to spend together.

Sticking her hand out to shake his, she replied, "Deal."

Chapter Three

Veronica shook her head and laughed. "What is your problem? As long as I've known you and Donovan, you both have been in this pseudo-relationship anyway. Now, for the first time since you've been friends, you *both* are single at the same time. What's stopping you from finding out if Donovan is your soul mate?"

"Because I know he isn't."

"And how do you know?" Veronica challenged. "The sex obviously rocked your world, because you haven't been your usually uptight self since New Year's."

"Wha—"

"Girl, hush and live a little. Donovan put something on you that has your hips swaying and cheeks blushing when you get lost in your own thoughts. That man has had a thing for you since college and you have been fighting your feelings for him just as long. I know you haven't forgotten how he used to escort you back and forth from the library at night, even when he wasn't studying with you. Then there was the time you caught the fool that shall remain nameless cheating on you, and Donovan hunted his ass down to set him straight after you cried on his shoulder."

Mya giggled at the memories. "William withdrew from all his classes and transferred schools just to avoid Donovan's wrath. That was kind of funny and pretty messed up at the same time, now that I think about it."

"Don't you realize the truth when it's been staring you in the face, girlfriend? That man loves you. I mean Billy Dee Williams, 'do you want my arm to fall off,' 'wait for you until you're ready for him' kind of love."

"Ronnie, are you saying I'm a dope fiend?" she joked, thinking about the movie Veronica referenced.

"You must be on something if you are willing to pass up a good brother like Donovan. The man has a great career, is incredibly scrumptious, and adores you. You have to be deaf, dumb, and blind not to want some of him."

"Don't rule out anything just yet. Somehow, he talked me into a no-sex, six-week courtship." Mya laughed when she saw her friend's jaw drop. "Enough about Donnie and me. This day of errand running is all about you and your big day. Now let's hurry up and finish this fitting so we can go grab a bite to eat!"



Donovan cut his eye at his other best friend, which only made Darius laugh even harder. Donovan wanted to flick the well-worn fitted baseball cap off the man's head.

"It's not a good time to look for a new best man on such short notice, Hootie," Donovan warned. He knew the dig at Darius's nickname would sober the laughter quickly, as Darius hadn't care for the moniker ever since high school, when a few classmates said he resembled Darius Rucker, a.k.a. the lead singer of Hootie and the Blowfish.

"Call me Hootie again and see how tempted I will be to test that theory. Back to Mya and this foul mood you've been in. How many times did you sleep with her?"

"Why do you think I slept with her?" he asked, trying not to fall into a trap.

"You're off your game and there is only one explanation that I can think of. You're in love."

Donovan took a swig of his beer and thought about his next words before revealing them. "I asked her to commit to dating for the next six weeks. I told her it would be nonsexual, and it gives us the opportunity to get to know the other beyond friendship."

"If she fell for that, you do still have game. Both of you know more about each other than I could ever know about Veronica, and I am getting married to her at the end of the month."

"I know Mya, but she is afraid to see me as anything other than her friend. If I play my cards right, I will be able to convince her that I am the perfect man for her."

"And if you don't?" Darius challenged.

Donovan didn't even want to answer the question. He knew that if his plan failed, he would ultimately lose her for good.



Mya greeted Donovan at the front door. Being the perfect gentleman, he surprised her with a bouquet of her favorite flowers before walking her to his car.

Once they were belted inside his sedan, Mya let her body relax against the luxury leather seats that hugged her body nicely. The day he'd ordered the car, she helped him select each custom option. At the time she teased him, saying a beautiful man needed a sleek ride. Now seeing him behind the wheel wearing one of her favorite suits made her stomach twirl. Donovan was not going to make resisting him easy if he planned to court her like this.

Donovan knew how much she loved his Bentley. He preferred driving his SUV, but tonight he wanted to impress the woman he was falling in love with. Watching her ease up for the first time since he'd knocked on her door helped.

"How was your day?" he asked, while pulling out into traffic. Although it was Saturday, they'd both admitted they would be working at home on various projects.

"Productive. I helped Veronica with a few last-minute wedding details. What about you? Did you ever hear back from the Phillies?"

"We're still going back and forth." Once he reached a red light, Donovan took her hand in his and kissed it before looking at her. "You look amazing tonight."

Mya blushed and looked away. Donovan caught her chin and turned her back toward him. "Don't get shy on me now, sweetheart."

After making small talk to ease her once again, Mya finally asked, "Where are we going tonight?"

"I thought we'd start out at your favorite steakhouse and go from there."

Mya clapped with glee. "Del Frisco's? I love that place!"

"I know."

An hour after leaving her apartment, both were seated across from the other trying to figure out which conversation to have next.

"Didn't you mention that we were supposed to be getting to know each other again?" she quizzed him during the awkward silence. Mya flashed him a sly grin as her eyes sparkled.

Donovan laughed before putting his fork down. "You're right. I was just sitting here kicking myself for bringing you here. This is probably too familiar to explore something new."

"But I love it here and I rarely get to come here, except when you bring me."

"You could always come on your own? Perhaps with Ronnie and your other friends? Or even a date?"

"Tsk tsk. This is our place. You first brought me here when we had our pre-graduation celebration after we completed our last undergrad final. You know I can't come here with anyone else but you." Then she leaned back in her chair once reality kicked in. Now it was her turn to test him. "I can't believe I said that. I'm acting like you never brought anyone else here other than me."

The glint of jealousy in her expression did not escape Donovan. Seeing her react to the idea that he'd dated other women in the past gave him hope.

Reaching across the table, he took her hand in his. "Sweetheart, you're the only woman worthy of this place."

They both looked at each other before suddenly bursting out with laughter. Mya added, "This place is a chain restaurant, for goodness' sake. We're carrying on like it's the premier place to eat around here."

"That may be so, but I rarely get to eat a steak like the ones they make here. Of course, if it's no big deal, then you are more than welcome to pay, since it's just some random steak joint. And just a little piece of advice: they don't accept coupons, so don't even pull out your smartphone to see if you can find a deal on Groupon."

This time when Mya laughed, her eyes watered, and the sound was music to his ears. The last time he'd heard her enjoy herself so freely was New Year's Eve. Just before they made love when the moment had them caught up.

"No, Don. This is a date, so you pay," she replied, sobering. "And on that note, where is the server? I am ready for dessert."



Mya walked into Starbucks expecting to arrive before Donovan, but to her surprise, he was already seated in one of their club chairs. He waved her over, signaling that he'd purchased their drinks.

"I hope you don't mind, but I ordered the usual. I can get you something else, but with the long lines I knew there would be a wait, and that makes you impatient."

"Thank you," she replied while accepting the cup. She sipped her peppermint mocha and savored its warm, minty taste. Eyeing the plate on the small table between them, she smiled. "Please?"

He moved the plate closer to her, knowing she could not resist the vanilla scones. "You already know I planned to share."

After nibbling on her scone and taking another sip of coffee, Mya looked up at Donovan. She admired him in his casual wear. He had just left the gym and asked her to meet him for coffee nearby. Mya watched Donovan pull off his cap and run his hand through the short curls before he leaned back in the chair, stretching his sweatpants-covered legs before him.

"I had fun with you last night, Don. I still can't believe you convinced me to go skating at the ice rink as cold as it was."

He smiled warmly at her. "I promised I would keep you warm if you ever got cold out there."

"Easy now." Her teasing tone relaxed them, and soon their camaraderie was back in effect. "So what's this you wanted to ask me?"

Donovan couldn't believe he was nervous. He could go into a shareholders meeting and turn a corporation around before lunch, but for some reason he didn't know the right words to say to the one woman that mattered the most to him.

"I have a business trip on Thursday. I will be away for a few days, and I know how much you look forward to our Friday lunches. So I was wondering if you would like to join me in Chicago and then head to Miami over the weekend."

Mya wasn't a stranger to his travel requests, but they were usually part of a group scenario. The last time the two of them had traveled alone together for a weekend trip was to New York, because their friends had other plans for the holidays.

"Normally I would not have a problem with it, but that's kind of going against our six-week goal of no"—she paused—"you know."

"And who says we have to sleep together on this trip? I can sleep on the couch in the living room if it makes you more comfortable."

"We'd share a room?"

"This year I decided to make a resolution of being conservative. Why waste a perfectly good hotel room when we can simply share a suite?"

"Good try, but that's not going to work on me."

"Okay, here is the real story. The room in Chicago is a comp, and I don't think either of us want to dish out five grand for another room at the hotel."

"Five what?" she echoed in disbelief.

"You heard me. I have to make an appearance with a client at a charity reception. I will basically be in and out of Chicago, but one of the perks is the luxury suite we will share. We are flying private to Chicago with my client, and then Friday morning we catch a flight to Miami, where I have a quick meeting that afternoon. Once the meeting is done, we can kick it the rest of the weekend."

"Why are you dragging me along while you have to work?"

"Although it would technically be work, it will also be a chance for you to relax and kick back for a few days."

"We can do that in Hawaii during the wedding week at the end of the month. Besides, I can't take off from work."

"Why not? You rarely take any time for yourself, and it's only one day. You usually work from home on Friday anyway, so just hook up to Wi-Fi for a few hours if it's that serious."

"You have all the answers, don't you?"

"If I had all of the answers, then I would be your man. Am I right?"

Mya chewed on her lip nervously, averting her eyes from his. His dark, piercing gaze released the butterflies in her stomach.

“As long as I am home in time for work on Monday morning without falling asleep at my desk, I’m down.”

Donovan quickly gave her a smile, flashing both of his dimples. Leaning across the table, he quickly kissed her on the cheek. “Thanks, babe.”

Chapter Four

Mya placed her suitcase in the trunk of her car and retrieved the tote bag she carried for work. After locking her car, she waved off the driver that had delivered her from the airport to her office on Monday morning before turning to walk to the garage elevator. Her mini vacation was now officially over.

Despite having to catch the first flight out of Miami that day, Mya appreciated Donovan's suggestion of picking her up from work on Thursday and both of them staying in Miami until Monday morning.

Feeling like her feet were floating, Mya leaned against the wall in the elevator, reliving every moment of the last four days. From the moment the chartered flight departed on Thursday until the parting kiss she shared with Donovan, Mya had spent each moment learning new reasons why Donovan was the man for her.

Earlier in the week, he'd arranged for a personal shopper at her favorite department store to help her pick out everything from cocktail dresses and shoes to the hot bikini she'd proudly worn on the beach Saturday morning. During the flight, he'd helped her troubleshoot a project she was working on, reminding her of their study days in college.

Even when she was tempted to bend the rules and do more than share the king-size bed in their suite, it was Donovan that reminded her that he intended to carry out their agreement until the end. He didn't want her to have any regrets again, and knew the damage from another night of sex could be irreparable this time.

Tracing her lips with the tips of her index finger, she sighed, thinking about the moment he'd pulled her into his arms just after their final goodbye. In the middle of the corridor, with her gate on the left and his on the right, Donovan called her name and she turned back toward him. He took three purposeful steps until he stood in front of her again. Then with ease and control, he'd covered her mouth with his for the first time since New Year's. For a brief moment, she was caught by surprise, until the humming of morning activity around them could no longer be heard.

She missed the first call for people boarding her flight as his tongue crashed against hers and his hands held her body close to his hard one. Mya melted against him and let him take over, willing to fall into his trap promising a life full of love and devotion. Then, just as soon as it started, the kiss ended.

Donovan pulled away and stared back with confusion in his eyes. For a moment, Mya wanted to call off all preset requirements for their courtship and say to hell with it. Then Donovan shook his head, as if privy to her thoughts.

"I shouldn't have done that. I wanted you all weekend and I just let my need for you get the best of me." Before she could protest, he squeezed her hand gently and released it. "Let me know when you make it home safely. They're boarding for your flight."

Then he turned on his heel and walked away, disappearing in a crowd down the corridor. She knew he still had another half-hour before his flight departed for Dallas, but she hated to see him go. The final boarding call was what finally made her move her feet, and with that kiss and the memories of the man she was falling in love with fresh on her mind, Mya had returned home ready to change her outlook on dating her friend.

Donovan walked out of the conference room and glanced at his phone. Seeing the text from Mya letting him know she'd made it to work safely put his mind at ease. Now he needed to get his erection at ease, which was a difficult task while thinking about her body in the two-piece she wore when they decided to make sand castles at the beach two days before.

"Donovan!" he heard a woman exclaim. He turned around and saw the assistant general manager of the Rangers approaching him.

"Jackie Reeves. How are you?" he said, greeting the woman that had helped him secure a deal for his first client. The transaction was a feather in the baseball executive's hat as well. "What brings you to the Mavericks office? Don't tell me you're ready to take on basketball, too."

He knew the woman was giving as well as she received from the boys' club organization. Rarely did women move up the ranks as high as she did.

"No, just tending to some foundation business. Are you in town for long? We should catch up."

"I just flew in this morning and promised a client I would stick around until tomorrow."

"I have tickets for tonight's Mavericks game. Let's grab a bite before the game and catch up."

After accepting her offer, Donovan and Jackie decided on the details for the evening. He then left the building to check in to a nearby hotel, hoping to catch up on a few hours of sleep.

Being in bed beside Mya all weekend and occasionally feeling her soft skin brush against his had made it difficult to sleep each night. Despite being in a king-size bed, he always woke up feeling her lush behind curved up against him on his side.

Donovan knew he should have opted for the couch, but Mya had argued against it. She claimed his frame was too big and long to be cramped up on a

sofa. When she offered to sleep on it instead, the only way they could stop arguing was to share the bed. He knew it was a bad idea from the moment he suggested it, especially if he was awake all night with a hard-on, but sex could not be the remedy for his discomfort.

After setting his alarm with enough time to shower, call Mya after she got off work, and meet Jackie for dinner, Donovan closed his eyes and tried to fight the dreams that kept popping up about Mya. He tossed and turned, but sleep eventually found him.



Mya reached for the remote and surfed the channel guide. She didn't know why she was looking for the Dallas Mavericks game, since she wasn't a fan of the game or team, but she tuned in anyway when she found it.

Speaking with Donovan during her ride home, he'd told her he was going to catch the game with an old friend. By the end of the first quarter, she felt like a silly schoolgirl looking for her crush at a high school basketball game. Just as Mya was about to turn off the television, the camera did a close-up of fans sitting courtside.

Mya felt her stomach clench the moment she saw Donovan on the screen. Seconds later, it felt like a brick dropped into the pit of her stomach when she saw Donovan sitting beside a beautiful, leggy brunette that he was obviously familiar with.

Tears slowly fell from her eyes the moment she saw Donovan wrap one of his arms around the woman and pull her close. Then Ms. Beautiful took her hand and rubbed it on his thigh as the couple laughed well into the commercial break.

Mya stood up and turned off the television before walking into her bedroom to cry herself to sleep.



Donovan sat stewing in the back of the limousine Saturday evening. He had been in a funk ever since he tried reaching Mya Monday night after the basketball game and failed to reach her.

Here he was back at square one, and the only reason he could think of was the kiss he gave her was too close for Mya's comfort.

"That's bullshit," he grumbled, remembering their easy banter later that day when they spoke before the game.

Darius looked up before passing him a glass. "What did you say?"

"Nothing, man."

"You're the best man, so it would help that you act like the ambassador of my fun-filled bachelor party and forget about your woman for one night," Darius argued.

Donovan agreed with him, but the task was difficult. Finally, he tipped the glass toward the men, and it was soon filled with Patrón.

After Donovan gave a quick toast, the men tossed their heads back and took big gulps of the fiery liquid. Donovan was the first to slam his glass down on the bar beside him.

"Another round," he calmly demanded with a grin. Hearing the men around him cheer, Donovan allowed his shoulders to finally relax for the first time in days. "Just be warned, Hootie. Tonight will be the best night you will ever have as a bachelor. Let the party begin!"

"Hear, hear!" some of the men chanted, while others cheered. Several minutes later, they arrived at the first stop of the evening. Donovan waited until everyone else got out of the car before pulling out his cell.

Turning it off, Donovan decided tonight he was going to forget all about Mya Norwood for the first time in ten years. And if she didn't get her emotions together, then their rift would be welcome to last even longer.



"Whose bootleg idea was it to have a coed bachelor and bachelorette party?" Vera complained. There was disgust evident on the bridesmaid's face as she scowled at the men in the next booth in the exclusive area of the lounge. "Ronnie, this is not how you celebrate your final days as a single woman."

The future bride waved off the complaint. "Oh, girl, stop complaining and grab one of these drinks! I actually like the idea of keeping an eye on Darius during his bachelor party. At least I don't have to worry about what stripper is waving her coochie-coo in my baby's face."

Mya then clarified, knowing she was not speaking to Donovan at all these days, even about wedding business, "For the record, it was not planned this way. I guess the guys decided to come to the hottest club in the city just like we did."

"Maybe we can convince the fellas to pick up the tab when we're done," Vera added. Her mood suddenly perked up at the mention of her idea.

"Good luck with that. You know how cheap they can get when they are united and bonding over drinks."

Ronnie tilted her head toward Donovan. "Especially that one. He can splurge when he wants to, but is quick to yank back his wallet when he's grumpy." Looking pointedly at Mya, Ronnie added, "And he is definitely in a mood tonight."

Mya shrugged and grabbed her mojito before getting up to dance. Seeing Donovan tonight unnerved her, but it was not going to deter her from having a good time. After the worst week at work and disappointing return home from Miami, Mya knew she deserved a good time tonight. Unfortunately, Donovan just had to be at the same place, threatening to put a damper on her fun with his presence. "His problem, not ours."

Vera brought Mya's thoughts back to the party when the woman complained again. "It's not too late to catch the strip joint before all the good acts are done. I have a wad of singles in my bag."

"Who needs strippers when we have beautiful people right here?" one of the ladies with them said.

"Strippers? Please! Male strippers don't do it for me, and the ladies at gentlemen's clubs are too ratchet with their booty-bouncing moves," Mya said. The ladies started giving their best impressions of strip dancers in a club, but it was Mya that surprised them, abandoning her normally reserved behavior.

Hopping up on their table, Mya quickly gyrated her body to the 2 Chainz song blaring over the speaker. Before long, the women around her started tossing dollar bills at her, and the men soon joined in on the fun.

Donovan shook his head, noting this was the second time in less than a month that the woman had drunk and acted wantonly in front of him. She rarely overindulged in alcohol, and tonight she was well past intoxicated again. Although the others were finding humor in Mya's silliness, he was feeling his body stir while watching her perform moves he recalled her once doing naked while riding him.

Later, after several rounds of shots, Donovan watched Mya let loose on the dance floor. After she stopped long enough to grab a bottle of water to drink, from his seat he watched her move to the sounds coming from the deejay table.

He turned away to answer one of his friend's questions and accept a cigar from the man. When he returned his gaze back toward her, he found Mya standing on top of a plush leather sofa. She started dancing to a sexy Rihanna medley of hits, along with two of the other women in the bridal party. The moment "Cockiness" played, Mya returned to the table to be center stage in the middle of her friends.

Removing her blouse, Mya twirled her hips around, wearing a lace-trimmed camisole over dark skinny jeans. Donovan fought the urge to snatch Mya off the table, throw her over his shoulder, and lock her up in his bedroom so no other man could ogle her, which many of the club goers were doing. But dammit, she was turning him on throughout the madness.

Donovan rolled the unlit cigar between his fingers, trying to keep his temper in check. His mounting desire fought with his jealousy.

Just before he could crush the tobacco out of his cigar, Mya made eye contact with him and all other people in the crowded room vanished for them. In that moment, he realized, she was only dancing for him.

Not one for voyeurism, Donovan narrowed his eyes, sending her a silent warning. She read his expression, winked, and then blew him a kiss. He caught on quickly and knew she was taunting him.

It was settled. Damn their agreement. Tonight, Donovan was going to have to taste her again. He was going to beat her at this game.

Chapter Five

Donovan reached for his phone on the coffee table and read the texts from their friends. After thanking one of the guys for driving Mya's car to her place after Donovan brought her to his house, he also texted Veronica to let her know that Mya was still asleep and recovering from the night before.

Donovan glanced at his watch, noting the noon hour, and decided it was time to wake her up with food. He had already worked out in his home gym, had breakfast, and reviewed two player agreements while she slept.

He wished she was basking in the afterglow of their lovemaking with pleasantly achy limbs keeping her in bed, but instead he'd been up half the night tending to her sudden bout of nausea. Before they all could leave the club, Mya was feeling ill, and looked even worse than she said she felt. A quick plan of action after choosing to call it a night was made, with a few people pairing off after having a good time, couples wanting to leave together, and Donovan stepping in to care for Mya.

Half an hour after walking into the kitchen to cook, he was in his bedroom placing a tray of food beside her on his massive bed.

Mya slowly opened her eyes after smelling food. She tried to get up, but she moved too quickly, unsettling her stomach, and had to rush into the bathroom.

Donovan shook his head and returned to the kitchen for a bottle of coconut water. He heard his shower running when he walked back in the room. She finally emerged with damp hair and puffy eyes, wearing one of his t-shirts and a pair of his basketball shorts, which hung loosely on her frame.

He pulled back the covers for Mya and gestured for her to get back in bed. Kissing her gently on top of her head, Donovan covered her up and handed her the coconut water.

"You should drink this first. It will help with your hangover." He watched her slowly sip before adding, "It is a hangover, right?"

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"We did have unprotected sex a few weeks ago."

"I would never act reckless if I were to get pregnant. Besides, I'm on the pill, remember? Or don't you believe me?"

He cut his eyes at her before reaching for the tray of food. Ignoring her remark, and after feeling a small tinge of disappointment, he placed the tray in front of her. "You should also get some food inside of you."

"The way that I'm feeling, I can't eat right now."

"That's exactly why you need to eat something. I made your favorite," he said. "It's not as good as Sarabeth's, but I figured I owed you lemon ricotta pancakes, since we didn't get to have brunch in New York."

Before she could protest, he had placed a cut-up piece of pancake in her mouth. She slowly chewed, savoring the fluffiness and pleasant taste on her palate. "These are divine. I could kiss you for this."

"I wish you would, but the last time we kissed, you stopped speaking to me."

Mya took the fork from him and dove into her plate. "That had nothing to do with the kiss and everything to do with your *friend* in Dallas."

"What friend?"

"You know, the one you were damn near making out with during the game."

Donovan tried to figure out what Mya was talking about. When he could not think of any offending action, he replied, "Mya, I'm lost."

"Didn't you pass the bar exam in three states?"

"What does that have to do with Dallas?"

She shrugged. "I would think someone as bright as you would know that getting all hugged up while sitting courtside is not cool when it's being shown on national television. Especially when you are doing it with someone other than your girlfriend!"

"So now you're my girlfriend?"

Donovan watched her eyes draw up into a frown, but her admission was the one bright moment in the midst of a ridiculous argument.

"No," she quietly admitted before chewing a piece of turkey bacon. "But obviously Miss Tall and Beautiful is."

"Wait. Are you talking about Jacqueline? The woman I was sitting next to at the Mavs game?" When he saw her nodding, he also noticed tears forming in her eyes. "Baby, that was someone I met a few years ago during a crazy deal with one of my clients. We are just friends, and when I ran into after my meeting, she asked me if I wanted to go to the game."

"I guess our dates aren't exciting enough for you," she mumbled.

"I wasn't on a date. Jackie is engaged to one of the players on the team. He had just proposed before the game, and when you saw me hugging her, it was probably after she told me. I was only congratulating an old friend."

Suddenly Mya felt foolish. She turned away, but Donovan's reflexes were quicker. He took her chin in the palm of his hand and made her face him again.

Mya wiped the stray tear from her eye before lightly laughing. "I'm so embarrassed. I thought you took your sexual frustration to Dallas."

This time he smiled warmly at her and kissed the bridge of her nose. "It has not been easy, but for you I will wait forever."

"Don," she groaned. "I'm torn. I don't want to lose my best friend."

Leaning forward, he caught her bottom lip with his mouth. Slowly suckling her lips with his, Donovan kissed her tenderly. Hearing her release a throaty moan during the kiss, he deepened the kiss while she leaned back into the pillows.

"I'm not going anywhere, sweetheart. We will never lose what we have."

Mya heard his words and felt them. Reaching to caress his strong, angular jaw, she smiled up at him.

She reached for the hem of the shirt and raised it above her head, revealing her unbound breasts.

His eyes darkened with desire as he moved forward to feast on them both, taking turns licking around the dark, extended nipples. Donovan palmed and squeezed her breasts together and then took one last nibble on them before moving to her neck.

Placing a trail of kisses along her collarbone, he followed her skin as it bent in the arm, to the dainty wrist and finally her soft, trembling fingers. Taking each one in his mouth, he ran his tongue around them and sucked each finger one at a time.

He watched her as she stared back at him. Donovan rose long enough to remove the tray from the bed and place it on the floor. He then pulled down the shorts from her body in one swift move. Parting her thighs, Donovan went straight for the glistening, shimmery pearl that was throbbing between them.



Donovan woke up in the middle of the night feeling her lush backside rub up against his erection. He glanced to see if she was asleep and smiled, thinking about the last weekend when he wanted to slip inside her, but couldn't.

He kissed her bare shoulder.

"I don't think we did it like this yet," she said.

She slowly moved her leg back and over his. He felt her fingers wrap around his engorged shaft and position the head against her wet, warm opening. Picking up on her cue, Donovan thrust deep inside her, feeling her round ass push up against him.

After making love in the afternoon and twice already that night, Donovan remembered she was insatiable, and he had no problem trying to appease her.

"Oh yes, Donovan. Right there, baby. Just. Like. That," she commanded with each thrust, as her breasts bounced each time he was inside her.

He raised her leg above them while moving in and out of her. She was curled up against him with one of his arms wrapped around her. Donovan rolled over on top of her, grinding her body into the mattress beneath her stomach.

Once he felt her arch her back, pushing her bottom up against him, he had to fight his own release. He withdrew from her warmth and switched her position, now wanting to face her and hoping to make this moment last.

Donovan reached for her hands, intertwining her fingers with his. Taking her lips, he connected with her emotionally and passionately, knowing he would never let her go again. Mya was his and always would be. He'd fallen in love with her the day they first met, and he never wanted to waste another day being apart.

Slowly, he pushed himself back inside her, easing his penis in until he completely filled her. Stroke for stroke, he wanted her to feel how much he needed her. He thrust inside to show the depths he cared for her. He caressed her lovingly to remind her how much he craved her. Donovan needed her. He loved her.

"I'm coming!" she exclaimed, milking him deep within her body.

Feeling her body tighten and grow wetter around him, Donovan could not hold back. Then with one final thrust, Donovan's seed shot deep inside her womb to brand her and let her know no one else would ever be able to claim what was his. As his release shot deep inside her, he felt her body respond to each spasm, and she had another orgasm. He came so hard from their connection that a fog fell over him, and for a moment he could not think straight if he tried.

Once their bodies calmed, Donovan pulled up off her, wanting to relieve her of his weight. He couldn't wait to profess his love for her, but first he wanted to do it sincerely, without her thinking it was their lovemaking inspiring the declaration. He watched her roll away as he slowly lay down beside her.

"I can't be just a friend with benefits, Donovan." Her voice was soft and low.

Hearing her words quickly sobered him, sucking the tenderness of their moment from him.

Disappointed, he turned away without the strength to fight. "You should have realized by now that I'm not that guy, Mya."

"But I am only protect—"

"I thought you would know your *best friend* better than you do. Isn't that what you keep referring to me as? Goodnight."

Once he turned his back to her, she knew he was not going to hear her out or allow her to explain. Turning toward the wall, Mya closed her eyes and went to sleep.



Monday morning, Mya slowly trudged into work. Sunday had been a slow and depressing day. After waking up in an empty bed, Mya had searched Donovan's house to find him. After seeing him running on his treadmill in his basement gym, Mya parked herself in front of it and tried to get him to listen to her explanation about her fears.

Donovan had no patience for anything she had to say and decided to abruptly walk away, leaving her standing alone in the gym. She returned upstairs and Donovan wasted no time in telling her that he needed the day to get his head together.

Now it was Monday afternoon, and Mya had just discovered she was finally being offered a position at the New York home office that she had been trying to get for quite some time. Oddly enough, all the excitement Mya had stored up while waiting for the news was lost. Instead of celebrating, Mya wanted to fix things with Donovan, but he would not return her calls.

Confused and emotionally defeated, Mya focused on the promotion and responded to the chain of emails detailing the position and transfer. She promised to give them an answer soon once their offer negotiation was finished.

Two hours later, Mya called Veronica from her car on the way home. After sharing news of the promotion, she weighed the pros and cons with her friend.

"You took this job hoping to move your way up to this position, so what's stopping you?"

"Four years ago, I was ready to move anywhere in the world, but now I don't know. I don't really know anyone in New York and would have to start my life all over. I would also have to start right away, which leaves me little time to even adjust to the idea of a move."

"New York is two hours away, Mya."

"But have you been stuck in traffic coming out of that city?" she joked.

"Does this have anything to do with Donnie? Have you talked to him about it?"

"He's not speaking to me right now."

"Usually it's the other way around."

"You're right. I said something I shouldn't have said and he won't let me take it back."

"I don't know what to tell you, except do what makes you happy. You deserve it just as much as the rest of us do."

Mya soon ended the call and called her manager while driving home, letting him know she was accepting the position.



Mya walked into her apartment and glanced around the place she'd called home for five years. The painting on her living room wall was large and beautiful, but it would be the first thing she had to get rid of when she moved. There was no way she could take it with her.

Her eyes glistened with tears when she recalled the day Donovan presented it to her as a graduation present. He had painted a beautiful single rose growing out of concrete and told her she reminded him of that rose. No doubt Donovan took pity on her struggle to make a success of herself, as he was fortunate to have his family supporting him at every turn when her own family abandoned her.

None of their friends knew the artist, although on numerous occasions they had asked her. Donovan's talent was their secret, and she'd obliged him when he asked that she never reveal it.

Earlier that evening, Mya had waited for Donovan outside his home for several minutes before trying to reach him on his cell. When her calls went straight to voicemail, Mya called his office.

"He is out of town this week and next. May I take a message?" his assistant replied.

Unable to find any words, Mya simply hung up. She couldn't believe he'd left town without telling her he was going away.



Donovan accepted the package from the courier, tipped him, and then closed his front door. The size and brown wrapping appeared to be a large frame, but he was not certain what had been delivered to him.

Careful not to damage the contents, Donovan lifted the awkward delivery and placed it against the wall in his living room. As he slowly ripped the brown paper away, it did not take him long before he recognized the picture beneath the wrapping.

Pulling the envelope attached to the inside, he ripped it open and read the letter.

Dear Donovan,

You have no idea how much joy this painting has brought me through the years, but I think it is time it was returned to the rightful owner. I would have delivered it myself, but goodbyes are hard for me and I thought it would be best if I just leave.

I miss you already and will always remember you.

Mya

Chapter Six

Mya glanced at the email confirming her ticket reservation, realizing she'd forgotten to adjust her travel plans. Although she still needed to return to Pennsylvania to pick up some of the items Veronica wanted her to bring on the flight, Mya did not want to fly with Donovan.

He'd never called her back, nor did he acknowledge that he had received the package, but she was sure he knew by now that she'd moved to New York.

Mya looked around her new cubicle and started to hate her life for the first time since her first year in college. Two weeks ago, she was sitting in an office with an amazing view outside the window. Today, the only view she had was a calendar photo and computer screensaver. The New York office made her feel like just a number, but in Pennsylvania she'd felt like she mattered to the corporation. Now she was missing her best friend, because she had no one to turn to so he could help cheer her up.

"He probably changed his own flight just to avoid me," she said while returning her attention to the last of the work waiting for her before she left for Hawaii.

It was not like Donovan to run from anything, but he was definitely ignoring her.

Picking up her phone, Mya tried to change her reservation one last time before going on vacation.



"I'm surprised you didn't switch your flight so you could leave out of JFK," she heard him say from behind her.

Mya turned around briefly to glance at Donovan before stowing her carryon luggage in the compartment above her. She felt him move closer when he reached out to help her with the bag.

Instead of thanking him right away, she made herself comfortable in the first-class window seat.

"All the flights that would get me in on time were booked and I would have had to go standby."

Donovan nodded after sitting down in the aisle seat next to hers.

Mya kept her focus on everything but his face, including staring at his long legs in front of him. She knew their travel preferences. Donovan favored the aisle so he could comfortably sit, and Mya liked looking out the window. They

had perfected traveling together over the years, but this time they were alone without their clique, and neither of them was really speaking to the other.

"Thank you for upgrading our seats to first class."

"Both legs of this trip are going to be too long to sit in coach."

"I'll pay you back the difference when we land."

He waved off the offer. "Don't worry about it. I had plenty of miles that I could redeem."

She knew he'd paid out of pocket, but she wasn't going to argue with him. Uncomfortably they sat in silence until the plane ascended into the sky. It was Donovan that eventually spoke first.

"Ronnie and Hootie told me you relocated to New York. That was a pretty hasty move." His tone hinted that he was suspicious of her actions.

"I didn't expect the offer, but they needed to get someone in the position quickly."

"I'm just wondering why you never told me you applied for it or were considering the move."

Mya put down her iPad and turned toward him. "The day it was offered, I tried to reach you, but you were nowhere to be found. I had no idea you had plans to leave town either."

Donovan studied her face before responding. He was naturally a people reader, but his profession had helped him hone the skill. The woman beside him was jealous, but it didn't matter. She'd taken his feelings for granted and dismissed their recent activity as a fling.

"Marie needed me, so I flew up to Boston."

"Is everything all right now?" Mya knew Marie's history, and whenever Donovan said that his sister needed him, it usually meant his brother-in-law was being abusive. On many occasions, Mya had accompanied Donovan to help keep her friend calm and out of jail when his sister endured a physical or emotional bout with a man that had promised to love and protect her.

"It is now. I brought her and the kids back with me."

Without asking, she already knew. Donovan had given Marie one final warning the last time she returned to her husband, telling her not to contact him again when it happened unless she planned to leave the man for good. Mya hoped Marie planned to follow through with Donovan's help to get a restraining order and divorce.

Donovan quickly shared details about the call he'd received Sunday afternoon, after Mya left his home to the events leading to Marie seeking the order of protection.

"My parents and brother are staying at my place while I'm away. They are helping with the girls and keeping an eye out for him. It's easier for Marie to stay with me, since I have more than enough room for everyone at my house and it keeps her away from him."

Although Donovan's parents also resided in Boston, they had a small condominium due to their frequent traveling. His younger brother lived in Chicago.

"So that explains the bruising on your jaw."

Donovan rubbed his face and shrugged. "The bastard snuck one in on me. It never happened again."

As the plane descended, Donovan turned to Mya. "Do you mind hanging out with me during the layover? I have to meet up with a client in the lounge once we get off the plane, but we can grab a bite to eat somewhere nearby after. Maybe do a little shopping on Rodeo before we have to get back to the airport?"

Mya smiled appreciatively and accepted his offer. "It figures you would find a way to bring business on vacation with you."

"Don't tell me you didn't do the same thing, because I know how you are, Mya."

She laughed and watched him retrieve her carryon for her.

"I'm not the same girl," she protested. "After letting go in Miami those few days, I left all traces of work at the office."

Mya started to walk away, but Donovan tapped her on the shoulder and steered her to the side of the jetway, allowing other passengers to move past them.

"I'm not going to lie and deny that I didn't miss you, Mya, because I did. We used to touch base every single day, but since New Year's it's been rare that we can just be who we used to be with one another."

"I've been thinking the same thing."

"Then let's enjoy this trip, help our friends get married, and go back to being cool like we used to be."

When she agreed, he took her into his arms and hugged her close. Mya relaxed in his embrace and hugged him just as tightly. In those few fleeting moments, Mya sensed not only that he missed her, but that something was troubling him.

As they walked the corridor to the lounge, Donovan reached for her hand. Hoping to ease his apprehension, she didn't pull away. He needed her for some reason, and she wanted to be there for him, just like she had always been before

sex complicated everything. Together they walked hand in hand in silence until they reached their destination.

Donovan spotted his client sitting at a table. After brief introductions, despite Mya recognizing the professional running back, they all sat down for the quick, impromptu meeting.

"Thanks for meeting up with me before your flight home to St. Louis," Donovan started. "How are you doing now?"

The six-year veteran explained the rough bout he'd had in the past twenty-four hours. "I'm not going to lie to you. The news about my health still has me shaken up. Football is my life, and without it, I don't know what else I will do."

Mya felt like she was an intruder during a private conversation, but both men assured her she should stay with them at the table. She listened silently to the calm, hushed conversation between the two men that obviously respected each other.

"Fortunately, you have a degree in communications to go with your sports background. I already started making a few calls to see what we can do for your post-career, but first we need to get you one hundred percent healthy again."

The man leaned back in his chair, appearing defeated. He shrugged. "The doctor said I could probably get another year in if I wanted to next season."

Donovan scowled. "Why take the risk? I know it's going to be hard to walk away, but you have a wife and kids to look out for. One more bad hit could take you out permanently. That last concussion was no joke, and you see what's happening to so many athletes that keep risking their health out there on the field when they need to retire. I think you should announce your retirement in a week. That will give you some time to adjust to the news, and by then we will probably have a new job lined up for you with one of the networks."

Mya watched both men as they sat in silence for several minutes. Finally, Donovan's client nodded. "Just tell me when and where to show up. I'll be there ready to start my life over."

After the men exchanged a few final parting words, they all left the lounge and headed in opposite directions.

Once in the back seat, Donovan informed their driver of their next destination. His sullen mood now occupied more space in the car than the passengers inside of it. Mya reached for his hand and squeezed it.

"You miss playing, don't you?" she quietly asked him.

"Yes."

His one-word answer was simple, but spoke volumes. She heard the regret and sadness behind it. Mya remembered the day doctors delivered news that his injury would kill any chances of taking his collegiate talent to the pro level.

"I admire what you did," she finally told him. In that moment, she saw how much Donovan cared for others, and his selfless desire to improve the lives of those around him. "Not many people in your position would have had the courage to tell one of their biggest clients what you did. Just like you are still here willing to be friends, even when our attempts to be more failed."

He kissed the back of her hand and she curled up against him. For the first time since talking to his client, Donovan relaxed his shoulders and could smile.



"What's up between you and Donnie?" Veronica asked at the rehearsal dinner. The fragrant scent of tropical flowers surrounded them, and many of the guests mingled with each other, but nothing was going to deter Veronica from interrogating Mya about her behavior the past few days.

Despite the wedding activities that the bridal party was involved in, including a welcome reception, spa day, and rehearsal at the beachside ceremony site, Mya and Donovan's cautious behavior was noticed.

"You two have been walking on eggshells since you arrived."

Mya sipped her fruity beverage and shrugged. "We decided it was best that we remain friends."

Veronica rolled her eyes and hissed. "What a waste. I don't know why you keep fighting that man on his feelings for you. Just look at him over there. He hasn't taken his eyes off you all evening."

"It's probably because he wants to make sure I stay sober in his presence."

"You and I both know that is not why he has been stalking you with his eyeballs," her friend countered. "Can't you see the man is hurting because he has been in love with you since freshman orientation?"

Mya laughed and signaled for another glass.

"You can laugh all you want to, but I don't think you want to see it. Donovan Sinclair has had a thing for you as long as I've known both of you. I just don't understand how you could let a good man like that one get away."

"What are you talking about? Donovan is and always will be a stone-cold bachelor."

"Is that what you think? Obviously you're blinder to real love than I ever imagined."

"No, I'm wise. Not everyone can find a love like what you and Darius have."

"You're right, including you. But you could if you opened up your eyes and look at what's in front of you."

During her friend's abrupt departure, Mya took Veronica's words into consideration. Was she being foolish? Had she messed up a good thing with her fear and guarded ways? Shaking her head, Mya dismissed her thoughts and returned to the celebration going on around her.

Chapter Seven

Donovan got behind the steering wheel. While navigating his way to the turnpike, he programmed Mya's new address into his GPS.

After leaving Hawaii, the two had caught different flights to the East Coast. Mya had returned to Pennsylvania, but Donovan had flown to Boston to help his brother move their sister's belongings. He had just returned home the night before in the rented truck, and now he needed to see Mya.

What he had to say to her couldn't be done by telephone and couldn't wait until they happened to see each other again. Seeing Mya standing as a witness during the ceremony and hearing the minister describe the vows their friends had taken made Donovan realize he would not let settle for just being friends.

He'd thought of staying at home for a few more hours, but the scene around his home reminded him of the times they spent together there. Donovan did not want to go to his office, because he was useless when he couldn't think straight.

Donovan drove to Mya's after making one stop. He intended to wait in the lobby of her building until she returned home from work.



"Here is information about your severance. Unfortunately, we have to escort you out of the building after you sign this document. We have already taken the liberty of collecting your personal belongings for you," the human resources executive said before sliding a box across the conference room table toward her.

Less than ten minutes ago, she had been directed to the conference room after arriving at work. Suntanned and still glowing after witnessing a beautiful wedding, Mya had assumed an office meeting was going to take place. Seeing others with tears in their eyes and mumbling expletives while leaving small conference rooms adjacent to the one she was summonsed to was the moment she panicked.

An expressionless woman holding a clipboard had escorted her to the room, where she was told the company had been sold and her position was no longer necessary. The excuse that the new parent company had employees with seniority that would resume her duties could barely be heard over the panicking thoughts running through her head.

If she had taken her laptop with her, she would have been abreast of the news, but she had chosen to tune out her job until she returned to her desk that

day. Perhaps when she tried to retrieve her work email during her commute in, like she normally did, she would have discovered she no longer had access.

"I want to look this over before I sign it," she finally said when reality set in. Staring at the lengthy document, she recognized legal mumbo jumbo when she saw it.

"Just know you will not receive your final pay and severance until that document is turned in. Once signed, just return it to my office. We wish you the best of luck. Have a good day."

Mya looked incredulously at her while listening to the sound of the woman's robotic voice. In minutes, Mya had lost her job less than two weeks after relocating. What was she going to do now?

Uncertain of her future, Mya swallowed back tears as she exited the room.



Donovan glanced up from his makeshift office and saw her enter the building. He watched Mya walk into a small mailroom before she nodded to greet a security guard sitting at his station. Hearing the man inform her that she had a visitor, Mya slowly turned to see who was waiting for her.

"I didn't expect you for a few more hours. On your lunch break?" he asked, knowing he probably appeared foolish for camping out in her apartment building. But Donovan really wanted to see her, and felt he had no choice but to wait until she came home.

Seeing the box in her arms, it dawned on him that she'd left work for a different reason. When she shook her head, his suspicions were confirmed.

Donovan gathered his laptop before taking the box from her and riding the elevator to her apartment.

Mya unlocked her door, and they both walked into the temporary apartment she was leasing. Although her furnishings occupied most of the space, Mya had chosen the place in haste until she could find a home more suitable for her tastes.

Softly, she finally said, "They let me go. Apparently the company that bought them already has someone in the same position as mine, so I'm the odd man out. Their seniority in that position overruled mine."

Donovan immediately reached out to hug Mya. "You just started your position and moved here to accept it. Surely they aren't going to penalize you for being a newbie."

"They can and they did."

Donovan led her to the couch and they both sat down. Mya wiped away the last of her tears, refusing to cry more over something she could not change. "I don't know what I'm going to do, Don. What's the point of staying here when I don't have a job? Bbut I can't move back to Pennsylvania when I let go of my apartment there"

"Then stay with me," he suggested.

Mya quickly shook her head. "I can't do that. We are having a rough enough time as is navigating through our friendship right now. I hate to tap into my savings, but it will buy me a little time until I find something else. Unfortunately, I have to use that, because the two weeks' severance pay is not worth a damn."

"Two weeks?" he bellowed. "You worked for that company for years and that's all they gave you?"

She pulled out the white envelope containing all of her exit paperwork. "They haven't given me anything yet. I wanted to look this whole thing over before I signed off on anything."

Donovan swooped in and took her into his arms. "That's my girl. Let me take a look at it, if you don't mind."

"Be my guest." Mya then moved from the couch and stood up. "If you don't mind, I'm going to change out of these clothes into something else before I make some lunch. Do you want anything to eat?"

Barely looking up from the papers in his hand, he mumbled, "Sure."

Mya had just finished pulling on her favorite pair of yoga pants when she heard a knock on her bedroom door.

"Come in," she called out.

"Do you have anything in writing from when they offered you the position? An employee handbook or any other policy-related correspondence that you might have received since working there?"

Mya nodded and led him into her home office. She retrieved printouts of the documents he requested and showed him emails.

He quickly perused an email she had forwarded to her personal account negotiating the position she had most recently accepted.

"Do you mind if I use your office? I want to take my time looking through this."

"Go right ahead. I'm in no rush. I'll just go work on lunch."

The only time Mya saw Donovan over the next few hours was when she brought him a sandwich and the times he walked out the room to get something to drink. She popped her head in the door at one point to catch him in the midst of a heated telephone conversation, so she left him alone. She knew his job was

demanding and assumed his business took precedence over her severance package and surprise visit.

Just as the evening news was coming on, Donovan finally walked out the office and sat down beside her. He handed her a piece of paper and stretched out his legs in front of them.

"If you agree to this, they will messenger over a check in the morning," he said quietly.

Confused, Mya glanced at him before accepting it. She quickly read the revised offer and hugged him.

"You did this? For me?" she asked.

"Why wouldn't I? That initial package was crap and you deserved a lot more. After I reminded them of the guarantees in the offer letter, they want to give you your old job back."

"Screw that," she said. "I don't want to go back there now. I don't care how badly I need a job."

"I figured that much, but they do owe you the rest of your contract and a proper severance based on your time with the company. I had them toss in a few more dollars just for shits and giggles," he said with a smile.

"And I see you worked your fee into this deal?"

"Hey, they would have had to pay it anyway if we took them to court and proved your case. I would never charge you, but they don't know that."

"I thought you gave up being that type of lawyer."

"Maybe I did, but I never stopped my love for you."

Donovan leaned in and kissed her, once again reclaiming what his heart desired. He was relieved when she didn't protest.

Mya finally broke the kiss and smiled. "Thank you."

"Anytime."

He wrapped his arm around her, pulling her body close to his. "You know I didn't come to New York to fight your legal battles."

"I know."

"Since you know everything, why am I here?" he asked.

"I hope it has something to do with the feelings we still have for each other."

"In a way, it does," he answered. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out a small box. When he took the ring from inside it and held it out for her to see, Donovan heard her gasp. "Today is the last day of our six-week trial period, and you owe me a date."

Mya excitedly replied, "What are you saying?"

"The word 'date' could mean a few things. It could be something I take you on or it could be defined as a number on a calendar." Donovan reached out to

caress her face with his hand before continuing, "I think it's time we try the latter and set a date to commit to each other forever. I love you. I want to marry you and make you my wife."

"Yes!" she exclaimed, and let him slide the sparkling diamond ring on her trembling finger.

"I want to take you into that bedroom and make love to you all night," he murmured against her lips after they shared another kiss.

"Then what's stopping you?"

"I need you to promise me to stop running out on me or fighting the morning after. Woman, you're starting to give me a complex!" he joked.

Laughing with him, Mya stopped long enough to squeal after he scooped her up in his arms to carry her to bed. "Trust me, I never want to leave these arms again."

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